

John M. Smith and Charles Smith

A Transcription Of An Oral Interview

1969

Interviewed by
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Introduction

This interview was conducted in 1969. When possible, speakers' names were used in the transcription. At other times, speakers are identified as "interviewer" or "speaker." Brackets [] were used when the spelling of certain words and names could not be determined. Underlining _____ was used when remarks could not be deciphered.

Interviewer: . . . Being Negro, is that true?

Speaker: Ya.

Interviewer: _____ and all?

Charles Smith: _____ amount to anything. You always see, you know, there's some people is different. You know, you can see it show up on some of 'em. But it's not like it was in Champaign, Danville, places like that. Teen-ager, you could be dressed up in your best suit and have five or ten dollars in your pocket, and you couldn't eat any place in Champaign.

John Smith: That old fella who was running that restaurant just down west of the, IC depot it is now on the west side of the street there, he was a foreigner. He wouldn't feed _____. Haircut or a shave or eat any place in Broadlands or any of these towns around here. Three barbers _____ haircut.

Charles Smith: But the same way with Champaign, Danville, or these larger places like Goodwin's Theater, why, they had to sit up in one corner and pay just as much as anybody else would.

John Smith: But here, _____, we were just too far from the city and very few colored people ever come out here and wanted to work on the farm.

Interviewer: I was trying to think where Buffalo is. It's east, isn't it?

Charles Smith: East of Springfield. Between Decatur and Springfield.

Connell: Where had your father been prior to Springfield?

John Smith: He was in Tennessee. That's where he originally lived from.

Connell: We've got a book on that.

Charles Smith: He's 83 years old.

Connell: I didn't know counties still did that.

Charles Smith: Oh, ya. There's one for every county in the state.

John Smith: 386. Printed in '86.

Speaker: This will be the first edition. I'll bet they have some interesting . . .

Connell: So they came up from Tennessee and right after the Civil War to Springfield and your father, your father was a wood cutter.

John Smith: That's right.

Connell: A wood cutter, did you say?

John Smith: Chopped wood. _____.

Connell: What is that? What's a first milk cow?

Charles Smith: A milk cow. You get milk out of it. (Laughter.)

John Smith: He bought the first cow _____.

Connell: I see, I see. And he farmed down in Springfield.

John Smith: Just some small farming.

Connell: And then moved up to this area.

John Smith: _____. Moved across the prairie to south of Homer.

Connell: And moved out in a covered wagon?

John Smith: No. I guess he shipped to Homer and then come out, got out part way and then stayed all night and come on the next day.

Charles Smith: Shipped out on the train.

Connell: There was no town here at that particular time, was there?

John Smith: No. No. There was headquarters out here, half a mile north on the east side of the road.

Connell: Why do you call that the headquarters?

John Smith: That was, the man come from Ohio, I think, and they always owned this tract of land, they owned with several different fellas. _____. And then the heirs of Jacksonville, they got a hold of it, and they took to _____ and he sold out in small tracts to farmers.

Connell: Small tracts of about 80?

John Smith: Eighty acres on. Not just 80. Probably more than 80 first.

Connell: That's on, that's the location that we were at. Is that it?

John Smith: Yes.

Connell: So what, what did he farm? What did he do on the that particular farm?

John Smith: Sir?

Connell: What did he farm there? Grain and cattle and . . .

John Smith: Yes. Cattle, hogs and general farming.

Charles Smith: Horses in those days.

John Smith: Horses.

Connell: And he grew horses, raised horses there?

John Smith: Just farm horses. Maybe a _____ horse.

Interviewer: What about the schools?

John Smith: Sir?

Interviewer: Schools?

John Smith: Schools?

Interviewer: Yes.

John Smith: Yes, the school was a mile and three-quarters from the place.

Interviewer: Little one-room affair, was it?

John Smith: Yes.

Charles Smith: Lawndale.

Connell: Did you go to that?

John Smith: Yes.

Connell: You did?

Charles Smith: When I was in eighth grade, there was just five us in, in the grade school and two of us _____ and another girl in the eighth grade and my sister and another girl and a fella in the third grade. So, the next year there were just three students, so then they closed it.

Connell: What, did you raise the grain to sell to some elevator company or whatever?

John Smith: Yes.

Connell: Grain company?

John Smith: Grain. _____ Harry Allen was by here. Had two elevators. There's been three or four burnt here in time.

Connell: Well, Champaign-Urbana wasn't much of an area in '78 either, was it?

John Smith: No, not very large then.

Connell: University was there about 25 some years, is that right?

John Smith: I remember when it was a kind of a local, there wasn't much between Champaign and Urbana. And also when Eastside Park there, west of Burnham Hospital, it just was trees. Anyhow, I was probably 10, 11 years old.

Connell: What's the name of that park now?

Speaker: Between Westside, Eastside Park. _____.
Right behind the corner of, over where Healey and Springfield.

Connell: Do you have some interesting little tidbits, points of information that might be interesting about this area and about life here farming or anything else?

John Smith: Well, when I was a boy, pulling old horses, mules and I don't remember what year they got tractors, begin to get a few tractors. But during my farming days, why, I didn't use tractors much.

Connell: When did you retire from farming?

John Smith: '57.

Connell: That's a good many years.

John Smith: Yes. Yes, I moved to town here, built this house in '57, moved here in December.

Connell: Did you have a lot of brothers and sisters who also worked on the farm?

John Smith: I'd, let's see, it was half brother and one other brother I guess that worked on the farm. I had one brother that was a lawyer and one's a civil engineer.

Connell: Where was your brother, the lawyer? Where was he?

John Smith: Omaha, Nebraska.

Connell: So he moved down . . .

John Smith: That's where he graduated, I mean that's where he had his office, graduated, _____ Ohio. Then my brother, Walter, the next older brother, he graduated, twice, at the U of I, literature and arts and civil engineering.

Connell: Where did he go?

John Smith: He went to South America and stayed five years and come back and went _____ a couple and then traveled over the United States, where building permanently in New York. He died in '29, I believe, New York City.

Connell: Is your brother the lawyer still living?

John Smith: No, he died in 1912.

Connell: Oh.

John Smith: Soon after my father. My father died in, December the 29, 1911, very near the day he died, Decoration Day.

Interviewer: Who was that? Your father, you say?

John Smith: My father, he died in 1911, December the 29th.

Interviewer: I was noticing in here it said it was, he came to Springfield with General John A. McClernand.

John Smith: Yes, that was his father, I think. Let's see. McClernand. He come to Springfield with him, I think. _____.

Interviewer: It's interesting because when we were over in Menard County, why, we came across a thing for a Mead, John McClernand. I think he was the guy that started the Grand Army of the Republic or something.

John Smith: He was an officer in the Army. Yes. He took care of his horse, I think, and then he come to Springfield and everything was fine for a while, took out west of Springfield.

Interviewer: Said he was with him for his 13 years.

John Smith: Sir?

Interviewer: Said he was with him for 13 years here. Or in the same area, I guess. This is Mary Eliza. That would be your grandmother then, wouldn't it?

John Smith: Which?

Interviewer: Miss Mary Eliza Gaines?

John Smith: No, that was my mother.

Interviewer: Oh, excuse me, I know.

John Smith: She was married the first time, her son from the first marriage was [A.A. James].

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

John Smith: He was a farmer.

Interviewer: Was he around here, too?

John Smith: Yes, two miles and a half north. _____.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. Yes, see they came in 1848. Or started out.

Connell: So how many members of the Smith Family are still farming in this area?

John Smith: Well, there, he's the only one that lives on the farm.

Charles Smith: Well, Helen.

John Smith: Yes, and niece.

Connell: Your niece is living on the farm also?

John Smith: Yes. _____ lives out about a mile and a half.

Interviewer: Are you the John M. in here? John M. Smith is that your name?

John Smith: Yes.

Interviewer: You still a Republican? I was just noticing it said Republican in here. _____.

Charles Smith: Ya, there used to be a, grandma used to tell a story about right down on the corner by us there used to be a house sitting there across from where the preacher lived. His name was [Kincannon]. I graduated out of high school with his grandson. Grandpa was a strong Republican and he was a strong Democrat. And they'd get to praying and about two weeks before the election, they wouldn't speak to each other. And then about two weeks after, it had all blown over then.

John Smith: At one time, just east of the place out there, there was family the name of Rice, had two boys. And he and my father were _____. He was a Democrat and my father was Republican. So they'd argue politics, good humor, you know. And so one day my father was coming to town and he told one of the boys he'd buy him a new pair of boots with Harrison on them if he'd come back and _____ for Harrison. And he said he would. He was a Republican the rest of his days. He just died a few years ago.

Interviewer: Benjamin Harrison, is that who?

John Smith: The boy, Rice. I forget which one it was, but it was Rice. All the rest of them were Democrats, but this one and he was a Republican. _____
_____.

Connell: What was your first election you voted in?

John Smith: Well, sir, I couldn't tell you that.

Connell: National one.

John Smith: It's been, see I'm 83 and it's been a few years ago. I never missed an election, I guess, any kind.

Interviewer: What township is this now? This isn't Raymond Township?

John Smith: Ayres. Raymond's just a mile away.

Interviewer: That was originally Raymond, it says in here. Is that right?

Charles Smith: That's where I live out there. _____ Raymond Township, the line's right down here at the corner.

Interviewer: Well, they just platted it, though, since you moved here, though, haven't they?

Charles Smith: No.

Interviewer: Well, I see you moved. What about Broadlands? I was always under the impression that you sort of founded this place. Is that right?

Charles Smith: It's in Ayres Township. We get our mail in Broadlands. But we're in just a quarter of a mile in Raymond Township. That's Longview. I started to say something. Forgot what it was now.

Interviewer: I was interested in this in here that, it would be your father, it said he was a free man from Alabama. I never thought there was any black people in Alabama.

John Smith: Yes he was there when he was a little fella, I think. He found a _____ I think when he was about pretty good size lad and the teacher, they sent him to school, with their children and other children, the teacher got so she'd help him if any of the rest of the kids couldn't find, didn't learn the lesson, why the teacher'd ask little George, sitting in the back of the room. He could tell them, and of course the children went home and told the folks and then he had to, they made them stop letting him go to school. So he went taking care of a mill for them, I think some 15 miles from home, grist mill, still in the _____, and one of the neighbors there told him that he better leave because they were coming to kill him that night. He was too smart and out _____. So he got away from the mill at dark, about dark, and hid, and told us _____ come for him all right, but he wasn't there. So he went to Union Army that night and went through the rest of the war with, he was disarming Rebel soldiers.

Interviewer: Well, that is him then, if they're talking about. I kind of, I couldn't, I was trying to read this and I, you get a little mixed up with who they're talking about sometimes. He was the one who . . .

John Smith: Disarmed Rebel soldiers.

Interviewer: Ya, it has that down here.

John Smith: Then he comes, took care of General McClennen, McClelland, isn't it?

Interviewer: Ya. It says in here that he was a guide for the regiment of General Logan from Corinth to Jackson, Mississippi, when after he was detailed as a scout, ya, to disarm Rebels _____. His unusual intelligent. Recommend him to other officers in the Union Army. He was subsequently proffered the post of provost marshal of Jackson, Tennessee, and also an officer adjutant general at the same place. He must have been a pretty smart man.

Charles Smith: I started to tell you a while ago about here, Ayres Township right in this next mile out here, next mile, why it's not a full mile through there. They always told me, dad, that his father told them when they surveyed the state of Illinois they started in the western part of the state and they wasn't going to get to it in time, so they started another bunch over at the Indiana line. That's where they met out here. So that's the reason. (Laughter.)

Interviewer: That sounds like it makes sense.

Charles Smith: They come pretty close, though.

John Smith: See these two intersections through here is on the east half's _____ of the quarter section and the west half's 100 acres subtraction. Short that much. Should be 640 and it isn't quite.

Interviewer: What is it? Six what?

John Smith: A section's 640. 320's a half. _____ northern part of the state but I never went across this section. But here's short.

Interviewer: I can't even recall but there was something they put in there for, to take care of that, isn't there? I mean.

John Smith: How's that?

Interviewer: Well, I think there's a way when they do the sections they were off anyway and they used to have, I can't think what they call it, there's a name for it, in order to correct it. You know, they'd find out, maybe this wouldn't be a corrected one, would it? No, that wouldn't be off that much. Like if you'd be going along at, what is it? 640. That's what it's supposed to be. So if you're coming along and suddenly they hit one that they couldn't quite make it, to make it even out at the borders, so they'd even it out by taking some off of one and putting it on another.

John Smith: See, section 640 and this section right here is supposed to be 200 acres. It should be 320 and 520. Maybe _____. That's short you know.

Interviewer: The railroad wasn't here when you came in though wasn't it?

John Smith: Railroad?

Interviewer: Ya.

John Smith: No. Not till after my father came here.

Interviewer: Oh, really. It came after?

John Smith: Um hum. I think that will tell you. I believe it's in that.

Interviewer: Did you found the community of Broadlands? Did you or your father found the community of Broadlands?

John Smith: I didn't get you.

Interviewer: Did you found, were you the first settlers here, in Broadlands? Give the name of the town?

John Smith: Yes, wasn't too many. Just headquarters out here. Used to be, you see, I forget how many acres was in this tract of land and they'd made a failure in trying to farm it and raise cattle. They brought a bunch of cattle up from Texas

once and they had all froze, just piled up on each other in a storm, you know. And they set this grove out, used to be Walnut Grove here, and Cedar Grove, half mile north, they set that out there so it'd be protection for the cattle and horses in the winter, you know. And that barn that's out here half mile north that was built there at that time, I think, or before.

Connell: Why did the farm lands, why did they fail?

John Smith: Well, the ground was too wet. See, it wasn't drained.

Connell: Did they drain it by building the ditches?

John Smith: Yes.

Connell: And then that drains it off and then it evaporates?

John Smith: Yes. When I was a boy, the ditches for a mile and a quarter north, they just drained that and that helped drain the others all in places. This one east of the house out there _____ steers the other day, _____ steers, you know.

Interviewer: I bet it was a devil plowing in the spring out here, wasn't it?

John Smith: Sir?

Interviewer: I said, I bet it was a devil trying to plow up out here in the springtime in those old days, wasn't it, with the mud and everything I suppose.

John Smith: Wasn't it tiled, you know, you go up north of the place out there and you come back for the white horse and show blood where the green heads had ate the horse, you know. Flies, big flies with green heads.

Connell: What was it like in the winter time? Were you pretty much isolated in this area?

John Smith: Well, my older sister and brothers, they had to go to school the same as I did, a mile and three-quarters. And they walked over the fences in the snow and so on. I do remember once, _____ they had to scoop the snow by hand at that time because so you could bury them down there yourselves, _____, you know. Of course, now you go along with a machine and push the snow out of the way. But at that time, why, when these cattle all died, you know, why, the snow and everything they just piled up on each other, you know, smothered each other.

Connell: They were typical, the type of steers that were raised successfully in Texas?

John Smith: Yes. In Texas, which shipped and drove them through to here.

Connell: What were the first type of steers that were successfully raised here?

John Smith: What was that?

Connell: What type of steer was successfully raised here? A certain type?

John Smith: Well, I don't know there's any particular kind _____ here. A man by the name of [Culbertson] owned quite a few sections of land. He bought some cattle over from England, short-horns. No, wait a minute now. Now, I believe they're Herefords. One of the two. Well, then he went back out, I think they're Herefords, and then he went back and got some short-horns.

Connell: When was this?

John Smith: Sir?

Connell: What year was this?

John Smith: I don't know. Pretty near before my time, you know.

Connell: Oh, I see.

John Smith: But the old place was four miles south of town and just west.

Interviewer: Farming's changed a lot since you've been farming, hasn't it?

John Smith: Yes.

Interviewer: Bigger farms.

John Smith: I think I'm the only person _____
horses tilling.

Interviewer: Really?

John Smith: Kept a man in the winter and had to have something to do, you know, and the snow was worse than what it is now on the ground and _____ . Had a man hitch up four mules and go into town just to be driving them, give 'em exercise.

Interviewer: Oh, really? You don't see the mules very often any more.

John Smith: No, very few.

Interviewer: We were down in Tennessee, I saw a couple of mules, I think about two years ago. They were real nice looking animals, too.

John Smith: The last team that I believe I saw mules was driving from Texas to the World Fair in New York. They passed through Newman here, just south of here. I got a picture of them around here someplace.

Charles Smith: They had covered wagons.

Interviewer: They say that they all they had, all the animals got killed with some disease and that's when everybody went to tractors in this state.

John Smith: How's that?

Interviewer: Somebody said, I remember once there was somebody told me that they had some sort of an epidemic and the horses all died. In the 20s or something like that.

John Smith: They did cattle here at one time. Let's see. What was it they called?

Interviewer: Foot and mouth disease?

John Smith: Sir?

Interviewer: Foot and mouth disease?

John Smith: Yes. Between here and Champaign they killed a bunch of cattle. Just right east of Philo about two or three mile, buried them.

Interviewer: Do you remember when you first got your first tractor?

John Smith: How's that?

Interviewer: When you got your first tractor?

John Smith: When I got?

Interviewer: Ya. Do you remember when you changed to a tractor?

John Smith: You know _____.

Charles Smith: First one we bought, we bought a new Ford tractor. I wasn't old enough to go to school. And bought a whole new outfit. I'd go out and ride on it with him when plowing because it didn't have a guide on it. Got in a furrow you know and then you'd turn it on the end. He kept it one year, he said he was going to get rid of it next time _____ because he couldn't get that thing started. Pull and crank it and come down to his tractor and pull. Brand new one, too. (Laughter.) So anyhow, the next tractor he got was in 1933.

Interviewer: In '33?

Charles Smith: Ya.

Interviewer: What was the first kind?

Charles Smith: International. _____.

Interviewer: When you said?

Charles Smith: Well, I wasn't in school yet, pretty sure I wasn't.

Interviewer: How was the marketing? How did you market things in those days? What did you do? Did you do it like you do now?

Charles Smith: Ever since I can remember hauled it in here to the town's elevator.

Interviewer: To this elevator in Broadlands?

Charles Smith: Broadlands. And then we'd all go together. We'd have shelling and crews. We'd help each other, you know. And we had one fellow last year, _____, we took his corn to Longview. And then later years, well, after [Harry Allen] went out of business here in Broadlands, why, he had, him and his son had an elevator over at Allerton. _____. He'd haul his corn Allerton. That's six miles and a half.

John Smith: When father first come here, they'd haul the corn to Newman and Homer. Ten or 12 miles.

Interviewer: That's where the railroad was at the?

John Smith: Yes, I guess. Yes, I railroad, I see that. My oldest brother, my half brother, he and a family named [McCall] Mike [McCall] or his brother [Warren], they took a load of corn to Homer once, and got back to a couple of miles of Homer and got lost, home and got lost. They, unhitched the horses and going to stay all night, just camped there you know and then his brother, we called his brother and got up on the crib and hung a lantern up there. And they saw that light so they hitched up and come on home.

Interviewer: Do you see any difference between the relations like between white and black in your day and today?

John Smith: No. I don't know if they do.

Interviewer: In this area? Evidently everybody got along all right.

John Smith: I, _____, he just retired last night from the Community Club. He was president of the Community Club for a year.

Interviewer: In Broadlands here?

John Smith: Um hum. [Jess Ward]. He was president for a year. Every fellow serves a year, you know. I used to have a horse show out at the farm for a few years. They um, we give a trophy away out there and give everything we made to the Boy Scouts. Two of the fellas, three of the fellas and I, we kind of run it. And we give a trophy away, spectator the greatest distance from home. First year that was 100 miles, over north of Decatur, to Mount Pulaski. After that went to California two years and one year to Alaska. This man _____
_____. Got it twice, once at Mount Pulaski and once in California and he was on his way back. He stopped at his son's in Arkansas for a few days and he died there. So he was coming back get that trophy.

Interviewer: Is this under a township, are you still under a township government here?

Charles Smith: Ya. Have supervisor. Road commissioner. Township clerk.

Interviewer: I just wondered if Broadlands.

John Smith: Well, assessor. Have an assessor, too.

Interviewer: Ya. Tax assessor. How many is there in this township anyway, I was trying, altogether about 350, I know it says in.

Charles Smith: I know, I couldn't tell you that. There's not near as many as there used to be 'cause there's not near as many hired men as there used to be.

Interviewer: I was wondering about that.

Charles Smith: I tell you when I started grade school out there, there was 28 and 30. And that grade school and this eight years I was out there, you can see how, a lot of fellows, children was raised and they still stayed on the farm.

Interviewer: Ya, you almost have to have, what, about 480 acres to even look like you're doing anything now. And do it all by yourself.

John Smith: This man farming my place out there, he pulled in a year ago with a _____ field cultivator I guess and planter, maybe a disk, I don't know what he had _____ his tractor.

Charles Smith: Had to be _____ tractor. He had the field cultivator and eight rows of corn planted behind the other one. Ten wheels on the back. Two big John Deeres, I was coming, my wife and I come home from work and I told her, I said, if we had the money that equipment cost, we'd take us a good vacation. (Laughter.)

Connell: So does he own, this person who farms on your land now, does he own the farm close by?

John Smith: He rents one down south of town here. Four miles.

Charles Smith: And then he's got 80 over in _____.

John Smith: Yes, 80 over there now.

Connell: So he actually doesn't own any property.

Charles Smith: He owns 80 acres. That we know of.

Connell: And farms it on how much?

Charles Smith: Well, it's almost a section down there.

John Smith: A small section down here, 500 and some acres, and then 600, and he farms over 700 acres.

Interviewer: Are they leaving now, the number of people that are farming, original farmers around here? They're all cutting out? Much fewer now?

Charles Smith: Fellows getting jobs in town.

Connell: Well, is it because they don't want to buy larger farms or no one will sell the property?

John Smith: You can't buy a farm now hardly because \$1.10 corn and \$1.90 for land, why that don't work very good. (Laughter.) And I think corn is \$1.10 _____ a day.

Connell: Would this be a rental or do you get part of the product?

John Smith: _____.

Connell: Is that standard?

John Smith: Sir?

Connell: Is that standard or ?

John Smith: Well, it's getting to be where it's standard. Used to be half, give 'em half and pay half the expense. This man just talking to me \$45 an acre and he paid everything.

Interviewer: So he has the equipment of _____ is that it?

John Smith: Sir?

Interviewer: He has the equipment?

Charles Smith: I don't know how many tractors he had. He had one big John Deere _____ sitting bottom of the plow. He pulled in there this fall, had three,

one five, and one four and one seven. When you go down to the field, a half mile road with that much equipment it turns over a lot of black dirt.

Interviewer: _____ not going to do it now. Not even going to plow up anymore. They're just going to seed right over the. . .

Charles Smith: Got a lot of _____.

Connell: I didn't follow _____?

Speaker: Going to seed right over it. They're not going to plow it up anymore. They're just going to seed right the stubble.

Connell: I didn't know that at all.

Charles Smith: Lot of bean ground they don't plow anymore. You just use the cultivator on it, instead of plowing up and disk.